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DEPT FOR NEA/PPD (DBENZE); NEA/ARP (RJACHIM); R; IIP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [SCUL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: New Audiences Reached At Riyadh International Book Fair

¶1. Summary: For the first time, Embassy Riyadh participated in the Riyadh International Book Fair February 26 - March 14. Despite the prohibition on any Embassies' exhibits and participants being limited to publishing houses, post negotiated its participation as the U.S. Information Resource Center (IRC). Embassy volunteers staffed the booth and interacted with thousands of Saudis, including students, teachers, families, and government interlocutors. Saudis genuinely welcomed the opportunity to engage with Americans, some for the first time, and expressed eagerness for future opportunities. End Summary.

Embassies need not apply  
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¶2. In discussions earlier this year with Deputy Minister of Information and Culture Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Sebail, Public Affairs Counselor convinced the Deputy Minister to make an exception on the ban on Embassy participation if we branded ourselves under the IRC banner. We made the case that we are publishers, citing the range of IIP publications that the U.S. government produces annually. The IRC booth was the only international booth staffed with Embassy representatives, and the only booth that provided both higher education opportunities and cultural information in addition to the publications on sale. The Ministry of Information and Culture officials who approved the IRC's participation accepted the outreach component of the IRC booth.

An opportunity to engage  
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¶3. Ministry officials noted the IRC was one of this year's most popular booths throughout the fair. Numerous passers-by expressed their happiness at finally seeing U.S. participation and American publications. Embassy volunteers noted their interactions at the book fair were some of the best interactions with Saudis they have had all year. Given the closed nature of Saudi society, the fair offered Embassy officials the opportunity to interact with hundreds of Saudis, both male and female, from cities like Qassim, Taif, Medina, Khobar, and Al-Hassa, all traditionally hard-to-reach areas, during each shift. Some of the most interesting interactions included those with Saudi families (during the family-designated days), who often expressed interest in children's literature. Many visitors requested English Language Teaching materials, students sought English as a second language materials, and there was an unexpected, high demand for more American literature texts in English.

Measurable impact - huge!  
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¶4. The IRC booth sold 1,829 publications from a selection of 66 titles (Note: All titles were submitted in advance for Ministry approval; no titles were barred from inclusion. The Ministry's guidelines clearly stated all printed publications had to be sold. End note.). The IRC raised \$5,496, and distributed more than 3,000

US Info CD-ROMs for free.

¶5. The public outreach at the book fair also laid foundations for longer term relationships. More than 65 alumni of U.S. universities signed up to be included in the Embassy's alumni database. The IRC gathered numerous requests to participate in upcoming book fairs or college fairs at local institutions. Recent orientation sessions for Saudis seeking to study at U.S. universities have been packed as a result of advertising at the book fair. Embassy officials staffing the booth were invited by students to visit their respective universities, including Imam Mohammad Islamic University, one of the most conservative institutions in the Kingdom. A March 15 Arab News story highlighted the IRC's participation and publications about studying in the U.S., which further broadened the Embassy's reach.

¶6. Comment: The Embassy's participation at the Riyadh International Book Fair as the IRC was the Embassy's largest outreach event this year. In a closed society and security-restricted environment, the book fair underscored the need to continue to identify new and creative opportunities for traditional people-to-people diplomacy. We plan to seek additional opportunities for face-to-face engagement while carefully balancing security requirements. End Comment.

GFOELLER